Listing of Claims:

1. (cancelled)

2. (cancelled)

3. (cancelled)

4. (cancelled)

5. (cancelled)

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42. (cancelled)

43. (cancelled)

44. (new) A feature rights management system for a telecommunications network that relies on feature keys requested by hardware, said feature rights management system comprising:

a feature rights server having a repository for storing feature keys, the feature keys containing at least activation rights for telecommunications features, telecommunications feature units and destination IDs;

a plurality of aplication sub-agents, each aplication sub-agent operating over the telecommunications network to perform telecommunications functions enabled by feature rights, wherein each aplication sub-agent is capable of being provisioned by a telecommunications network operator, and, upon provisioning by the telecommunications network operator, the aplication sub-agent pulls needed permissions from a feature rights management agent and pushes un-needed permissions back to the feature rights management agent;

a feature rights management agent having a its own agent ID and operatively coupled to the feature rights server to receive feature keys from the feature rights server, to positively compare the destination IDs in received keys to its own agent ID and thereby store the activation rights and units of telecommunications features in a repository and for receiving un-needed permissions pushed from aplication sub-agents and thereby placing them in the repository and for receiving pull permission requests from aplication sub-agents, considering whether the repository has available rights and thereby delivering consenting permissions requests to the pulling aplication sub-agents; and

a common bus for connecting together agents including the plurality of aplication sub-agents and the feature rights management agent.

45. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 44, wherein operator intervention is effected over a protocol or command line interface to provision the plurality of aplication sub-agents.

46. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 44, wherein the agent ID corresponds to a serial number of a feature rights management agent.

47. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 44, wherein each of the plurality of aplication sub-agents comprise an application card operatively disposed in a plurality of slots of at least one chassis, each application card operatively coupled to the feature rights management agent over the common bus on a chassis backplane to pull needed permissions and push un-needed permissions from the feature rights management agent.

48. (new) A feature rights management apparatus for a telecommunications network that relies on feature keys requested by hardware, the feature keys containing at least activation rights for telecommunications features, telecommunications feature units and destination IDs, said feature rights management apparatus comprising:

a plurality of aplication sub-agents, each aplication sub-agent operating over the telecommunications network to perform telecommunications functions enabled by feature rights, wherein each aplication sub-agent is capable of being provisioned by a telecommunications network operator, and, upon provisioning by the telecommunications network operator, the aplication sub-agent pulls needed permissions from a feature rights management agent and pushes un-needed permissions back to the feature rights management agent;

a feature rights management agent having a its own agent ID and receiving the feature keys from a feature rights source, the feature rights management agent for positively comparing the destination IDs in received keys to its own agent ID and thereby storing the activation rights and units of telecommunications features in a repository and for receiving un-needed permissions pushed from aplication sub-agents and thereby placing them in the repository and for receiving pull permission requests from aplication sub-agents, considering whether the repository has available rights and thereby delivering consenting permissions requests to the pulling aplication sub-agents; and

a common bus for connecting together agents including the plurality of aplication sub-agents and the feature rights management agent.

49. (new) A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 48, wherein the agent ID corresponds to a serial number of a feature rights management agent.

50. (new) A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 48, wherein operator intervention is effected over a protocol or command line interface to provision the plurality of aplication sub-agents.

51. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 48, further comprising a feature rights server having a repository for storing the feature keys for the telecommunications features and for transferring feature rights between the feature rights management agents and the server in the form of the feature keys.

52. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 51,

wherein a connection between the feature rights management agents and the feature rights server uses feature keys because it is un-trusted; and

wherein a connection between the plurality of aplication sub-agents and a corresponding feature rights management agent uses permissions, and not keys having destination IDs, because it is trusted

53. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 51,

wherein the feature rights management system further comprises a chassis comprising a plurality of card slots; and

wherein the plurality of aplication sub-agents are cards disposed in the card slots and connected to a common backplane bus.

54. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 53, wherein the feature rights management agent comprises a system manager card operatively disposed in a slot of a chassis.

55. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 51, wherein each of the plurality of aplication sub-agents comprise an application card operatively disposed in a plurality of slots of at least one chassis, each application card operatively coupled to the feature rights

management agent over the common bus on a chassis backplane to pull needed permissions and push un-needed permissions from the feature rights management agent.

56. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 51, wherein the feature keys are of at least two kinds of keys: network keys destined to the feature rights server and element keys destined for the feature rights management agent.

57. (new) A feature rights management system according to claim 51, wherein the feature rights management agent requests keys for features from the feature rights server when the number of unallocated feature units is deficient to satisfy a pull for permissions by an application sub-agent.

58. (new) A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 51, wherein the feature rights management agent releases feature keys from a feature rights management agent and moves feature rights keys to the feature rights server.

59. (new) A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 48, wherein each feature unit designates how many instances of a feature category is permitted within a domain of a distribution node identified by the destination ID.

60. (new) A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 48, wherein the telecommunications feature units of the feature keys comprise data designating a maximum number of simultaneous telephone calls that are permitted to use a given feature.

61. (new) A feature rights management apparatus according to claim 48, wherein an activation right for a telecommunications feature of the feature keys comprises a prepaid billing feature in a telecommunications network.